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# Morocco and the EU. New tendencies in transnational migration and the EU's migration policies

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Taking Morocco as example this article describes significant and interesting new tendencies in transnational migration and the EU responses. The problematic development in parts of the Middle East in 2012-13 and – more specifically – the security issues related to growing, uncontrolled migratory movements affecting the Moroccan state tend to reinstitute pragmatic, low-profile responses on behalf of the EU.

## Introduction

In a recent article in the Guardian an often heard view is brought forward, namely "that Morocco has become one of the main transit routes for illegal migration into Europe from sub-Saharan Africa."<sup>1</sup> However, if looked at a bit more thoroughly, this might be something of a myth.<sup>2</sup> It is the ambition of this article to describe recent migratory movements in a Moroccan context, to discuss their complex character and to analyze the EU's responses to the important phenomenon.

According to Moroccan Consulates, legal Moroccan migration to Europe more than doubled from 1993 to 2007.<sup>3</sup> It is an interesting fact, though, that the growth rates regarding migration to different European states were very different. Where France shows a moderate average annual growth rate of 4,8 percent, Spain and Italy show annual average rates of 52,2 and 22,4, respectively. Especially, of course, the rate related to Spain is exceptional. In the years after 2007, the growth has continued, despite, as pointed at by Claudia Finotelli and Giuseppe Sciortino, a remarkably rigid visa regime across the Mediterranean.<sup>4</sup>

As registered by Eurostat, Morocco is one of the top scorers when it comes to immigration to Europe, although the later years have seen immigrants from China and India arrive in even larger numbers (defined as numbers of visas).<sup>5</sup> If the view is changed to immigrants with an origin outside the EU who received citizenship during 2009-2011, Morocco is still the country from where most of the non-European immigrants staying in Europe actually obtained a European

<sup>1</sup> Paul Mason: "The EU is ignoring the human rights abuses behind Morocco's razor wire", *The Guardian*, 2 September 2013.

<sup>2</sup> See for instance Myriam Cherti and Peter Grant, "The Myth of Transit. Sub Saharan Migration in Morocco", *Institute for Public Policy Research*, London 2013.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted from Anna di Bartolomeo, Tamirace Fakhoury, and Delphine Perrin, "Carim – Migration Profile Morocco. The Demographic-Economic Framework of Migration. The Legal Framework of Migration. The Socio-Political Framework of Migration," *European University Institute*, 2009, p. 1.

<sup>4</sup> Claudia Finotelli and Giuseppe Sciortino, "Through the Gates of the Fortress: European Visa Policies and the Limits of Immigration Control," *Perspectives on European Politics and Society* 14, no. 1 (2013).

<sup>5</sup> Eurostat, "Migration in the EU," *European Migration Network* (Brussels: EU-Commission, 2013).

citizenship.<sup>6</sup> For Morocco, being one of the relatively poor Middle Eastern states, migration is a crucial phenomenon, not the least due to the significant remittances the country receives from the millions of migrants staying abroad. Still it can be discussed to which degree all important economic indicators point in a positive direction, as discussed by Fida Karam and Bernard Decaluwé, who demonstrate, that for the Moroccan labour market the significant emigration has its problematic sides in the sense that on the...

“one hand, emigration raises wages or diminishes unemployment in the vicinity from which the migrant departs. On the other hand, the conditions of the labour market after emigration attract inflows of workers from another developing country or from another region inside the same country. Inflows of workers increase, in turn, the pressure exerted on the labour market of the receiving region.”<sup>7</sup>

In other words it is shown that the Moroccan emigration to the southern EU member states has a tendency to increase the actual migration into Morocco from Sub-Saharan Africa and also the internal Moroccan rural-urban migration. These phenomena taken into consideration the impact of migration on the Moroccan urban labour market is at best ambiguous. And, as emphasized by Michael Collyer et al, it is necessary to underline, that the links between migration and development go far beyond the purely economic aspects.<sup>8</sup> A study comparing migration from Mexico to the US with migration from Morocco to Spain, concludes, that regardless of the significant income related to remittances and thereby the “considerable contributions of Mexican and Moroccan migrants to improved living standards in origin areas, migration cannot overcome structural development obstacles and deeply ingrained

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid. In the period 2009-2011 the number of Moroccans, who obtained a European citizenship, was 189.932, a little less than one tenth of all citizenships obtained in Europe over the three years.

<sup>7</sup> Fida Karam and Bernard Decaluwé, "Is International Migration a Cure for Moroccan Unemployment?," *The Journal of North African Studies* 15, no. 4 (2010), p. 518.

<sup>8</sup> Michael Collyer et al., "Migration and Development: The Euro-Moroccan Experience," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 35, no. 10 (2009).

political and economic inequalities in Morocco and Mexico.”<sup>9</sup> Rather it seems that migration on one side can lead to a deepening of these inequalities and on the other side will have a tendency to create apathy and depoliticization among the young labourers, who concentrate much of their energy on the migration perspective, thereby not focusing on the failure of the Moroccan state to create acceptable economic conditions for the development processes in Morocco itself.

The domestic political scene is in other words not much affected by demands for democracy from the young Moroccans heading for Europe. However, the apolitical migration-oriented state of mind does not represent a permanent situation. A recent study taking its point of departure in Moroccans staying in the Italian Piemonte region, shows how the Moroccan immigrants in the Italian context are preoccupied with democratic progress and – confronted with the imperfect Italian democracy – take part in demanding political improvements. The study concludes with a highly interesting remark, stating that the “new social actors’ experience of identity and democracy could play an increasingly important role in our societies,”<sup>10</sup> signaling new dynamic aspects of the migration processes, which add new dimensions to the transnational perspectives related to migration.

### **Transit migration and the Moroccan labour market**

The transit migration dimension of Moroccan migratory movements is changing its character in the sense that it adds a significant aspect to the overall migration patterns in Morocco. This is summarized by Mohamed Berriane et al, stating that a “twofold transformation of the migration patterns in Morocco is taking place: on the one hand, there is the discontinuity caused in a traditional migratory field following the drastic closing of the EU’s external borders; on the other hand, there is the emergence of a new pattern in that same migratory field that makes Morocco a destination for migratory flows.”<sup>11</sup> The study has taken

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<sup>9</sup> Hein de Haas and Simona Vezzoli, "Migration and Development on the South–North Frontier: A Comparison of the Mexico–US and Morocco–EU Cases," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 39, no. 7 (2013), p. 1061.

<sup>10</sup> Rosita Di Peri, "Perceiving Democracy in Migration: The Case of Moroccans in Piemonte," in *Migration, Security, and Citizenship in the Middle East*, ed. Peter Seeberg and Zaid Eyadat (New York: Palgrave, 2013), p. 83.

<sup>11</sup> Mohamed Berriane et al., "Immigration to Fes: The Meaning of the New Dynamics of the Euro-African Migratory System," *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 34, no. 5 (2013).

place in Fes, but according to observations by the author there are good reasons to believe that the same phenomenon is a reality in other Moroccan cities.<sup>12</sup> New dynamics of transit migration related to Africans from south of Sahara point at fragmentations of the migration process leading to long stays in transit countries like, *in casu*, Morocco.<sup>13</sup>

In an EU context it is important that this changing reality is taken into consideration. Cities like Fes, Casablanca etc. become transit 'hubs' so to speak on the way from the African states south of Sahara, constituting a huge migratory sending system in the Sahel region, to a migratory system on the other side of the Mediterranean, the EU states. Europe has a new challenge there, which it is important to consider, because migration in the Moroccan context from being a bilateral affair to be dealt with in agreements becomes a part of a regional migratory system. Probably these dynamic aspects of the migratory movements, including the non-Moroccan migrants, contribute to forms of irregular migration which include illegal as well as the semi-legal migration, without which the economy in several southern Spanish businesses (hotels, agriculture) would have problems surviving. The complex transit migration patterns, together with the other types of migration from Morocco, represent a reality, seen from the European side, with both positive and negative dimensions. In a long term perspective the Moroccan migration can contribute to solving the problem with a lacking labour force in the ageing European states. But the more chaotic character of the migration processes as they have developed over the last decade, adds to the security reservations on the EU side.<sup>14</sup>

Summing up it seems that EU migration policies in the context of Morocco first of all have their traditional foci on the measures aiming at prohibiting a liberalization of admission policies. There is no clear consensus in the EU concerning the migration–development nexus – and the conflict between

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<sup>12</sup> Personal observations and informal anonymous interviews in Tangiers, Casablanca and Marrakech, Morocco, July 2013.

<sup>13</sup> Michael Collier, "In-between Places: Trans-Saharan Transit Migrants in Morocco and the Fragmented Journey to Europe," *Antipode* 39, no. 4 (2007). The same is convincingly documented by Derek Lutterbeck concerning Libya, see Lutterbeck, "Across the Desert, across the Sea: Migrant Smuggling into and from Libya," in *Migration, Security, and Citizenship in the Middle East. New Perspectives* ed. Peter Seeberg and Zaid Eyadat (New York: Palgrave, 2013).

<sup>14</sup> Tina Freyburg et al., "Democracy Promotion through Functional Cooperation? The Case of the European Neighbourhood Policy," *Democratization* 18, no. 4 (2011).



northern EU-states being reluctant to engage in solving the problem and the southern EU-states, who insist on putting the issue high on the EU agenda (but also represent double standards by living with the semi-illegal migration in southern Spain).<sup>15</sup> Spanish–Moroccan relations underline the large potential for internal disagreements between EU member states within a highly contentious policy field.<sup>16</sup>

Morocco is the largest recipient of EU ENP assistance with 580,5 million Euros for the 2011-2013 period with a focus on economic development, environmental projects and projects dealing with the legal system and human rights.<sup>17</sup> In June 2013 a Mobility Partnership was signed between the EU and Morocco, as it can be seen in the Press Release from the EU-Commission.<sup>18</sup> It is mentioned in the related material, that of around 3.5 million Moroccans living abroad, some 84% (or 2.9 million people) lived in Europe. The main objective of the agreement, however, is to focus on the possibilities of developing better management of migration from Morocco to the involved European states “recognizing that the issue of migration is a key element of the exemplary partnership which has linked Morocco and the EU for several decades.”<sup>19</sup> Apart from this polite statement, the agreement is very preliminary, characterized by declarations of intent. However, it seems to be rather early to analyze an agreement, which not really has been tested by the Mediterranean reality. The EU-Commission Press Release of June 2013 also mentions that negotiations with a view to entering similar agreements are in progress between the EU and Tunisia.

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<sup>15</sup> Daniel Wunderlich, "Differentiation and Policy Convergence against Long Odds: Lessons from Implementing EU Migration Policy in Morocco," *Mediterranean Politics* 15, no. 2 (2010).

<sup>16</sup> Vera Van Hüllen, "Europeanisation through Cooperation? EU Democracy Promotion in Morocco and Tunisia," *West European Politics* 35, no. 1 (2011).

<sup>17</sup> EU-Commission, "EU's Response to the "Arab Spring": The State-of-Play after Two Years," (Brussels: European Commission, 2013).

<sup>18</sup> EU-Commission, "Press Release: Migration and Mobility Partnership Signed between the EU and Morocco," in *EU-Commission Press Release*, ed. EU-Commission (Brussels: EU Commission, 2013).

<sup>19</sup> EU-Council, "Joint Declaration Establishing a Mobility Partnership between the Kingdom of Morocco and the European Union and Its Member States," ed. Council of the European Union (Brussels: Council of the European Union, 2013).

## Conclusion

The Moroccan reality is significant and interesting. The agreement on Mobility Partnerships was signed in June 2013 in a context where work migration is dominant and counted in millions, most of it with southern EU-states as destination. The European need for a labour force is thus partly covered by Moroccans, but apparently, as mentioned, to an increasing degree in competition with Chinese and Indian workers. This reality creates – at least potentially – a problem for Morocco, which receives enormous amounts of remittances contributing to stabilize a weak economy, a negative balance of payments and to make it possible to buy necessary machinery, IT and foreign knowhow outside the country. As mentioned Morocco receives significant amounts of transit migrants and refugees from states in Sahel and from states south of that region. As shown many of these migrants settles – at least temporarily – in the big cities in Morocco and create a *lumpenproletariat* there, which hardly is an ideal situation seen from the side of the Moroccan state.

The situation is not entirely negative in the sense that for a local labour market even in a poor country like Morocco it can be an advantage to receive a cheap labour force, which can be exploited in jobs, which the locals might want to avoid. In a sense such a situation constitutes a parallel to the southern European “import” of a semi-legal workforce, without which a number of businesses in the long run probably would cease to exist. Obviously practices like this – both in southern Europe and the southern Mediterranean states – contribute to creating a problematic security environment, which quite naturally is very difficult if not impossible to control. Seen from the European perspective this is not a situation, which in the long run can be allowed to exist. Summing up the EU might want to continue its relatively good working relationship with the authoritarian King Mohammad, which so far, through adaptive policies have been able to avoid massive protests against his regime. Added to this we see forms of migration, which in a sense anticipate a future where a more dynamic cooperation might be a reality, as shown with the Moroccan migrants in Italy, insisting on taking part in democratic processes there.

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